

Lost and Found by vvywern

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff, Mileven, first work in the fandom, focuses on Mike and El but other characters will pop up, follows through season 2, more tags to be added as i work my way through writing this fic, pretty introspective for the first couple chapters probably??, some spoilers for season 2 so be careful reading, the most Wholesome kids, will work my way to writing something that DOESNT HURT

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Summary:

"And losing Eleven was not just his loss. It was the world's, too."

Mike Wheeler has to cope with the fact that Eleven is gone. And then he has to cope with the fact that she isn't.

1. Chapter 1

"Grief is the price we pay for love."

Queen Elizabeth II

Mike Wheeler is not sure if he hates the nightmares or the dreams more.

The nightmares are the same, always, over and over -- she looks to him over her shoulder and says goodbye. The light pulses from the demogorgon and the beast explodes to shreds, suddenly just a cloud of dark ash and soot around her. Eleven exists in the eye of the storm; there one second, and gone the next. She does not come back, but he can feel her unrelenting pain. Even when he wakes.

The dreams vary, but she is always there. They are always together, him and her. He can feel her touch, the softness of it, and he can hear what he's imagined the radiance of her laugh to be. And it's always so real. He wakes up to the life being sucked out of him, the happy swell in his chest dropping and leaving him a close relative to loneliness. He wakes up to a world where she might no longer be.

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He wakes up in the early, dark hours of the morning, drenched in sweat. He's lost for a second in the tangle of sheets, able to forget about the nightmare for a mere moment as he focuses on just getting out of bed. He clumsily stumbles across his room, catching himself on the edge of his dresser and heaving, trying to catch his breath. It feels like he's suffocating, like he can't get enough air into his lungs and it translates to a dull, burning pain.

This is common.

He slowly eases his door open and sneaks through the hallway to the stairs, tiptoeing with caution down each step and wincing at every creak of the wood. Once downstairs, he unlocks the front door and

steps into the fall night. There is an automatic shiver as the heat of his body meets the bite of the cold. Goosebumps rise the hairs on his skin and he hugs himself.

He lowers himself to sit on the couple of steps that lead to the front door and he runs his hands through his hair, looking down at the ground before turning his gaze to the dark abyss of the sky. In his room, he feels a total disconnect from her. Outside, it's different.

He has no idea where she is, if she's okay, if she's safe. If she's even *alive*. But there is a comfort he cannot explain that comes with existing within a still moment of the world. He feels her in it all: the quiet and calm, the peace and comfort, the beauty and repose. He feels her in everything, but in this he feels her the most; El. She is the cold that makes him feel so much, he goes numb.

If she is not alive, she at least exists.

He checks his watch, which reads just past two in the morning. He looks at the time and reads it over and over and over and *over* so that he might not think about El for those brief seconds. It doesn't work; there was a time where she was wearing this watch, where the faux leather strap was secured around the thin width of her wrist and a time when her eyes were reading the numbers as anxiously as he was.

It starts to mist, minute beads of water tickling the pale skin of his face and arms. He takes a while to notice, as he's so cold that he's close to becoming numb. The mist lands weightless on his lashes and curls of hair, gradually gathering in a number large enough for him to see. He looks up to the sky again, blinking the dew away to see the moon in clarity.

He does not feel the rain, though, until it is a downpour; until his hair is plastered to his skin and he's unable to stop shuddering and his clothes stick to the slender frame of his body. The rain soaks him to the bone and he can feel himself freezing over and for a minute he's afraid; afraid that he's freezing to death, that he's dying, he's dying, he's *dying*.

He wants to scream; he wants to grab the world by the neck and

demand it to tell him at least that she is not out here in the cold, alone and scared and abandoned like she was when he first found her. He wants to grab the world by the throat because he's angry at it, for taking her away and hurting her and giving her the most and worst pain it knew.

He wants to scream but he cries, harder than he's ever cried before. His throat aches from resisting and his head pounds in agony and it just gets worse the longer he sits out in the paralyzing cold.

Mike Wheeler is nothing if he is not hurting, if he is not breaking into not two pieces but a thousand, a million, shards. He is nothing if he is not angry and frustrated, confused and devastated, from all the loss that came from losing *her* . The fact that she was so significant, so worthy of being not something but *everything* , and the fact that he'd just stood and watched her *disappear* -- he can't stand the thought.

He hunches over, collapses into himself, folds himself over so many times so that he may become so small that eventually he'll be nothing. Losing Eleven was not like losing Will. It was not a loss of familiarity. It was a loss of potential; a loss of what could possibly *be* . It was an inconceivable, incomprehensible loss of what he was learning to know and love. And losing Eleven was not just his loss. It was the world's, too.

In the morning he's rushed to the hospital, found not in his bed but on the ground before the door of his house.

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"It's day fourteen," he says into his walkie-talkie, sitting cross-legged in her little tent that's down in his basement. "I got home from the hospital an hour ago. The doctors said I have hypothermia. They don't know how I survived for so long out in the rain."

Mike goes on to talk for a while about his day. He doesn't even know if she's there on the other side listening to him, but the slim chance that she hears him is enough to keep him talking. The chance to let her know that he has not forgotten her, and that he will not give up on her, is enough to keep him talking.

“My mom keeps asking me why I was outside. I can’t tell her the truth. But I can tell you. I was out there because I know you’re out there too, El. Over and out.”

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

Two things!

1. I added a small bit of extra text to the end of the first chapter!

2. This chapter follows Eleven and is a really, ridiculously quick exploration of her time with Kali. It's fairly rushed so I do apologize for that, but I didn't want to linger on bits of Season 2 in this fic that didn't work directly toward Mike and Eleven's reunion. I might go back to this chapter in the future and flesh it out more, we'll see. Nonetheless, I think it's decent writing.

I hope y'all enjoy :-)

“Is it possible for home to be a person and not a place?”

Stephanie Perkins

She shouts at him as she storms to her room, thrusting her arm out and slamming the door shut in his face. He pounds on the door after her, but she's not listening to him anymore. She covers her ears, pressing her palms up against them and trying not to focus on the muted, muffled yelling. She curls up into the corner, drawing her knees up to her chest and trying to make herself small enough that the panic can't find her.

Leave me alone, leave me alone, leave me alone.

She weeps, her hands moving from her ears to her hair. Her fingers knot in the curls and she tugs, not enough to pull it out but enough to feel a sharp, hot pain across her scalp. Her head falls back hard against the wooden wall and she bangs her head like this several times. Usually, if there was enough physical ache and discomfort, the panic would let her be. But this time, it didn't. She cries so hard that she starts to feel dizzy and it's not long before she's too exhausted to

continue.

Jim Hopper checks on the door to her room once it grows quiet inside. It gives way, the knob turning and granting him entry. He quietly steps inside, crossing the room to the corner where he knows she'll be tucked away. He kneels down beside her, feeling the guilt come back like it does after every argument. It feels that most their time together is spent yelling and he's so *angry* with himself for that. He's so *angry* that there is a routine, in screaming and then waiting for the quiet.

"I'm sorry, kid," he mutters. "I'm so sorry."

He carefully gathers her in his arms and lifts her folded body from where she's sitting, asleep, and moves her onto her bed. He gently lay her down and brings the blankets over her frail body, and uses a stained handkerchief from his pocket to wipe away the small trail of blood from her nose. He lowers himself to sit down next to her bed, resting his head against the mattress and letting out a sigh. He toys with a blue bracelet around his wrist.

It reminds him to be better. She's just a kid.

He tries to be better but even if he was perfect, it would not have been enough to keep her from running.

* * * *

It stops raining by the time the bus pulls into the station. Eleven stares past her reflection in the window and out into the street, not sure what to make of such a busy place. She clutches the strap of her bag and walks down the aisle between the seats, stepping down the stairs and into the city air. She does not think for even a moment of turning back around; of getting back onto that bus to go back to Hawkins, or the cabin. Hawkins, nor the cabin with Jim Hopper, was home. Home was not even a place. It was more of a person; of people.

Eleven cannot explain how she knows where to go once she's off the bus. There is nothing signaling to her where she should turn except for the tug in her gut that lets her know that she is close, sort of like

a magnetic pull. The city is not familiar but the presence she's approaching, she knows it, pulling it from the fog in her mind and into her body. She is not used to feeling a connection so warm with promise.

The pull in her stomach leads Eleven through an alleyway, lit with flickering lights and filled with frightening people. She picks up her pace while putting her head down and slimming her shoulders. The unease that comes from being in the alley somehow heightens and fades at once when she enters an eroded building at the end. She wrenches open the rusted door and steps inside.

The small group that approaches cannot hurt her, even with a knife at her throat. They observe the image of her sister that Eleven brought, becoming increasingly intrigued. Eleven clings to their words to try and find some clue of where, of who, her sister is, so intent on what they're saying that she forgets the knife was there until she hears it clatter to the floor.

The warmth in her body pulses to life like a hot coal into fire as she looks over to see a girl approaching her and she's not like she looks in the picture but it's her, Eleven is sure.

"What is your name?" Her sister asks.

Eleven . "Jane."

* * * *

Eleven looks up to her sister Kali because Kali is what Eleven wants to be: strong and smart and beautiful. In just a day, Kali reveals to Eleven her raw power and it feels good; it feels like she is finally in *control* of what's wrong with her. Kali shows Eleven that what she has is a *gift* . Kali gives Eleven the chance to take revenge on people who hurt Mama, who hurt *her* . Kali urges Eleven to advocate for herself; to prioritize herself. And then, all too soon for things to end, Kali provides Eleven a *choice* .

"You're always free to return to your policeman. Or stay, and avenge your mother."

The decision was not hard because of a lack of an obvious answer. It was hard because it hurt. But Eleven knew who *needed* her and who *wanted* her.

“There’s nothing for you back there. They cannot save you, Jane!”

It didn’t matter that her friends could not save her, though. She had to save them, and there was only so much time she had left to do so. And after she saved them, she would save herself.

Everything about Eleven, as she looks at Kali for the last time, screams in apology and pleads for understanding and forgiveness. Her eyes water and her lips part, afraid that what she pleads for might be something she never gets.

She turns to the alley and runs as gunshots begin to fire again, fleeing from Kali’s cries and running blindly in any direction, just to get far enough away that she cannot turn back. The cold air slices down her throat with every sharp inhale of breath and it clouds in her chest. She runs through the acute discomfort until she approaches a main road, where she slows to a walk again and begins to catch her breath.

* * * *

She somehow finds the bus station, purchasing a ticket back to Hawkins using money she’d earned earlier from the man she had terrorized with Kali and her gang. She numbly sits outside while waiting for the bus, feeling so much that it feels like nothing at all, like water that’s so incredibly hot that for a moment, it feels cold.

Eleven doesn’t realize that she’s freezing until she steps onto the bus, where the warmth falls on her so suddenly that it’s nearly painful. She works the stiffness from her fingers and toes, focusing on this rather than on focusing on what has happened and what is to come. There would be a time to let herself feel all she needed to feel. There would be a place and time to break down and mourn what she has lost and she fights to keep her composure.

The bus engine rattles as it begins the journey back to Hawkins, and she stares out the window and cranes her neck until it becomes impossible to see the city for even a moment longer. It feels like she

left a piece of her behind there. But maybe this was okay. Maybe, this piece belonged to Kali and not to her.

A woman draws her attention away from Kali again and works to engage her in conversation. Eleven does not mind the distraction, though she's unsure what to say until she's prompted to answer where she's headed.

She says she is headed home and realizing this, realizing the fact that she's going *home*, she smiles just a little. Home; not where her heart was, but where it so badly needed to be. The hum of the engine and the occasional chatter of the woman next to her, accompanies Eleven home.

* * * *

The night appears calm as she steps out of the bus, but Eleven knows it isn't really, as she wanders toward home.

Home, as it turns out, is not simply Hawkins. She focuses on finding home by channeling all that she feels; all the grief, the love, the anger, the pain, the excitement, the fear, and casting it out like a line to exist beyond her body. She frees it all to find where it all comes from and it takes a minute, but it finds a place to anchor. A place in the woods.

Her bottom lip trembles as she exhausts herself to keep the line of emotions cast out so that she can get to where she needs to be; so that she can get *home*. The emotions are tied to so many memories and people and things but they are strongest when she lets the feelings orbit around one person.

She can feel him. He's so close and Eleven has to fight to keep from falling down as her emotions begin to overload and she works to stave off memories of Mike to avoid from an emotional breakdown. It feels similar to being haunted by him as she pushes onward, as she's so acutely aware of his proximity that it was now impossible to ignore. The *soon* that Jim Hopper had so often promised was not a myth.

The *soon* was *now*, and it revitalizes her. The strength that had been

sapped from her body floods back into her and the world, which had been slipping to a blur, comes back to focus to reveal a cabin a short distance away.

“Mike,” she breathes quietly, and the pain of everything was not enough to keep her from smiling.